

Harkin: Omnibus Agreement Increases Student Aid, Access to Higher Learning

"In our efforts to attract and keep good jobs in America - and to stay competitive in the global economy - we must increase access to higher education. The investments made in the omnibus will create opportunities for students, which we know is one of the ways to gain access to the American Dream." – Chairman Tom Harkin (D-IA)

On Thursday, January 16, 2014, the U.S. Senate approved H.R.3547, the omnibus spending package. The package included vital funding for education, included by Senator Tom Harkin (D-IA), as Chairman of the Senate Labor, Health and Human Services, Education, and Related Agencies (LHHS) Appropriations Subcommittee. The bill will boost support for Pell Grant funding, provide increases in student financial aid programs, and create a new initiative to support innovative strategies that will help improve outcomes and make college more affordable. The bill now goes to the President for his signature.

Among the highlights of Chairman Harkin's efforts to increase access to postsecondary education and training in the FY 2014 omnibus:

Pell Grants – The bill maintains funding for the Pell Grant program at \$22.8 billion. Combined with mandatory funding, the maximum grant is estimated to increase to \$5,730, an increase of \$85. The final amount, which is based on calendar year 2013 Consumer Price Index data, will be announced by the Department of Education in early February. The number of recipients is estimated to increase by 186,000, from 9,125,000 in 2013-14 to 9,311,000 in 2014-15.

Campus-based Student Aid – The bill includes \$975 million, a \$49 million increase, for the Federal Work Study program to help needy students meet the cost of their education through part-time employment. The bill also includes \$733 million, a \$37 million increase, for the Supplemental Educational Opportunity Grant program, which provides students with need-based grant aid to help reduce financial barriers to postsecondary education. Both programs incentivize and leverage institutional funding to support student financial aid.

First in the World – The bill includes \$75 million for 'First in the World,' a new initiative that will award grants to colleges and universities to implement innovative strategies in improving educational outcomes and making college more affordable for students and families.

TRIO Programs – The bill includes \$838 million for TRIO, an increase of \$42 million. The TRIO programs provide grants to colleges and universities, public and private organizations, as well as secondary schools to help low-income and first generation college students plan, prepare for, and succeed in college.

GEAR UP – The bill also includes \$302 million for GEAR UP (Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs), an increase of \$15 million. GEAR UP provides grants to States and partnerships to support early college preparation and awareness activities to ensure low-income elementary, middle, and high school students are prepared for and pursue postsecondary education.

Career and Technical Education – The bill provides \$1.1 billion, an increase of \$53 million, for Career and Technical Education, which provides high school and community and technical college students with core academic and technical, job-specific skills.

Workforce Investment Act Grants to States – The bill includes \$2.6 billion, an increase of \$121 million, to provide job training skills and assistance to low-skilled adults, dislocated workers, and low-income youth with barriers to employment.

Aid for Institutional Development – The bill includes \$521 million, an increase of \$18 million, for the Aid for Institutional Development programs, which are designed to strengthen institutions of higher education that serve high percentages of minority students and students from low-income backgrounds. Grants are awarded to individual colleges and universities to support improvements in academic quality, institutional management, and fiscal stability of the institutions.

For more information on Senator Harkin's education initiatives, visit <http://harkin.senate.gov/>, or follow him on Facebook <http://www.facebook.com/tomharkin> and Twitter <https://twitter.com/SenatorHarkin>.